

**Testimony of the Michigan Education Association**  
**RE: Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness**  
**Report on Building an Educator Evaluation System**

MEA supports full implementation and funding of the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness' recommendations for creating what it calls a "fair, transparent and feasible" system for evaluating teachers and school administrators. Our support is predicated on three crucial foundations: that the report be implemented in its entirety, not in a piecemeal or haphazard way; that ongoing funding is provided to insure that all of the administrators who carry out the evaluation system be fully trained on the evaluation process and model in use; and that high quality professional development be provided on an ongoing basis to meet the professional growth and development needs identified by implementation of the system.

If implemented by the state Legislature, the MCEE's recommended system would replace the more than 800 different evaluation systems employed in districts across Michigan. The report constitutes an improvement over what educators are currently experiencing in our public schools by suggesting proven strategies to improve educational outcomes. It does this by focusing on student learning objectives and teacher professional growth and ongoing improvement. We agree that the primary focus should be on professional growth of all educators, and that necessary data on which to base personnel decisions will naturally flow from such a system.

**Evaluations**

The MCEE bases its system on "rigorous standards of professional practice and of measurement," with the overall goal of enhancing instruction, improving student achievement and supporting ongoing professional development. It recommends that teachers be evaluated and classified into one of three categories: professional, provisional and ineffective. We agree with this recommendation for the reasons set forth in the report. Use of these three categories recognizes that everyone can grow and develop professionally and does not suggest that there is a category of teachers who are so exceptional that they need not grow further.

We support the proposal that teachers be observed multiple times over the course of a school year by a principal, assistant principal, curriculum director, superintendent or assistant superintendent. These observations would be based on an established observation tool,

selected and funded by the state from among the following options: Charlotte Danielson's "Framework for Teaching," the "Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model," "The Thoughtful Classroom" or "5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning."

We support observations by qualified peers, and agree that these must not be the only source of observation. In the case of teachers classified as "provisional" or "ineffective", peer observations should be for the purpose of professional improvement only with any observation geared toward, or used for, employment decisions being conducted by an administrator. Observations would count for at least 80 percent of the practice metric, with the remainder coming from factors such as student surveys, parent surveys and portfolios.

In response to earlier mandates of the Legislature, the MCEE report recommends that the other half of teacher evaluations would be based on student growth. The MCEE recommends that the state develop or purchase student assessments that are aligned to state adopted content standards in all core content areas like English language arts, math, science and social studies, as well as in high-volume non-core content areas where state adopted content standards exist (e.g., arts, health and physical education, career and technical education, and many high school electives). The MEA accepts this recommendation regarding the use of student growth data as part of teacher evaluations only so long as the curriculum content and student tests are aligned.

We support the report's recommendation that the state should "in all cases that are possible and professionally responsible", produce value-added modeling (VAM) scores for educators on state provided assessments in the core content areas. Such VAM scores should take into account the myriad of factors outside of the schools' or teachers' control that have a direct and meaningful impact on student growth and performance.

MEA has concerns about a portion of the proposed student growth component that calls for up to 10 percent of a teacher's student growth score, 5 percent of the total evaluation score, to be based on his or her entire building's VAM score. A middle school math teacher, for instance, should not be judged based on a student's growth in reading, since the math teacher doesn't teach that subject.

Ultimately the components of the evaluation system would be combined to categorize teachers as professional, provisional or ineffective. These three categories would replace the state's current categories of "highly effective," "effective," "minimally effective," and "ineffective."

MCEE Chairwoman Dr. Deborah Ball has said the goal of the proposed new rating system is to encourage professional development and growth, not “punishing teachers” or only giving teachers feedback “when there’s something wrong.” Instead, teachers receiving a professional rating would still receive specific feedback on how to improve. The MEA wholeheartedly embraces these goals. It’s time to stop treating the dedicated, hardworking teachers of this State as our very public whipping post and start recognizing them as the professionals they are and treat them accordingly.

Like teachers, administrators would be evaluated based on their performance and student growth. In addition, they would be evaluated based on the “proficiency of their skill in evaluating teachers; progress made in the school improvement plan; attendance rates; and student, parent, and teacher feedback.” Administrators would be classified in the same three categories as teachers, and subjected to the same rewards and sanctions.

“Administrators play a central role in high-quality instruction,” the report pointed out. “They support teachers, provide feedback, and enable and enhance professional learning communities.” We couldn’t agree more. The overwhelming number of teachers in this State recognize and support high quality administrators and count themselves blessed when they work with such women and men. The MEA also recognizes and supports the value of high quality administrators as the vital leaders they are.

The report acknowledges one of MEA’s major concerns with evaluations, that the validity of the entire teacher evaluation system rests upon competent administrators. After all, the report says, “the documentation of teaching is only as good as the observer.”

To that end, Dr. Ball has said it’s critical that the Legislature adopt a mechanism for teachers to appeal if they feel they’ve been unfairly evaluated, so that the evaluations are “consistent with the principles of the policy.” We support high quality, fair evaluations for all educators as well as a fair and impartial method of rectifying the situation when an evaluation is not consistent with the system that is put in place. We would go beyond the report and advocate for an appeals process jointly agreed upon by the school district and bargaining representatives of the teachers. In this way a fair and appropriate appeal process would be acknowledged by all in the process.

## **Local flexibility**

The MCEE's recommendations allow some flexibility for public schools that have developed their own evaluation systems.

Under the MCEE's proposal, districts could receive a waiver provided they can demonstrate that their evaluation system has "the same level of quality and rigor" as the state-approved system. If there's isn't enough documentation to support claims of comparable quality and rigor, a district would have to submit a plan explaining how it will gather relevant data on the evaluation system's technical soundness. In such a case, the district would be eligible for a probationary waiver good for up to three years.

We would only support a locally modified version of the state approved evaluation system, if it were satisfactorily demonstrated how the adaptations do not threaten the validity of the inferences based on use of the instrument. This is consistent with the recommendations of the MCEE.

Some have suggested that the MCEE recommendations apply only to "public school districts" and that other forms of public schools be exempted from the same strict, high quality evaluation system as set forth in the MCEE report. We do not agree with this suggestion. We believe that all children deserve to be educated by the highest quality teachers who are subject to the same rigorous evaluation system and provided opportunities for high quality professional development. There is no basis to support a contention that newer organizational forms of public schools have a lesser need for a rigorous high quality evaluation system. Nor is there any evidence that such new forms of public schools have developed any evaluation systems that are superior to those in the traditional public school districts or that are anywhere near as high quality as the system proposed by the MCEE report.